

I/WE CLAIM:

1. A cooking appliance comprising:
 - a cooktop;
 - at least one selectively controllable heating element arranged on the cooktop;
 - a controller for operating the at least one heating element; and
 - at least one control element, linked to the controller, for inputting first and second settings for the heating element, wherein said first setting establishes a first power level operated for a first time duration and the second setting establishes a second power level operated for a second time duration, wherein a cooking operation covering the first and second power levels is automatically performed.
2. The cooking appliance according to claim 1, wherein the second selected power level is less than the first selected power level.
3. The cooking appliance according to claim 1, wherein the controller performs a shut down function, terminating operation of the at least one heating element after a period of inactivity.
4. The cooking appliance according to claim 3, wherein the period of inactivity is from 4 to 6 hours.
5. The cooking appliance according to claim 1, wherein the controller automatically establishes the second power level if the second power level is not selected through the at least one control element.

6. The cooking appliance according to claim 1, wherein the at least one control element includes a digital display.
7. The cooking appliance according to claim 7, wherein the digital display includes first and second display sections, with said first display section indicating a power level and the second display section indicating the time duration.
8. The cooking appliance according to claim 1, wherein the at least one control element includes first and second sets of slew buttons.
9. The cooking appliance according to claim 8, wherein the first set of slew buttons include a first button for selecting a power level input option and a second button for selecting a time duration input option.
10. The cooking appliance according to claim 9, wherein the second set of slew buttons include a first button for increasing power level and time duration settings and a second button for decreasing power level and time duration settings.
11. The cooking appliance according to claim 1, wherein the first selected power level and first selected time period constitute a pre-heat process.

12. A method of performing a cooking operation on a cooktop including a controller and at least one heating element comprising:
 - selecting a first power level for the at least one heating element;
 - selecting a first time duration for operating the at least one heating element at the first power level;
 - operating the at least one heating element at the first power level for the first time duration;
 - automatically switching the at least one heating element to a second power level for a second time duration following the first time duration; and
 - terminating the cooking operation of the at least one heating element at the end of the second time duration.
13. The method of claim 12, further comprising:
 - selecting a second power level for the at least one heating element; and
 - selecting a second time duration for operating the at least one heating element at the second power level.
14. The method of claim 12, wherein the second power level is automatically established by the controller to be lower than the first power level.
15. The method of claim 14, wherein the second time duration is automatically established by the controller to be between 4 and 6 hours.

16. The method of claim 12, further comprising: displaying the first power level and the first time duration on a display formed as part of the control element.

17. The method of claim 16, further comprising:
pausing after selecting the first power level; and
flashing the first power level on the display.

18. The method of claim 17, further comprising: displaying the second power level and second time duration on the display.

19. The method of claim 12, wherein selecting the second power level requires selecting a power level lower than the first power level.

20. The method of claim 12, wherein the first and second power levels, and first and second time duration are selected through manipulation of a pair of slew buttons provided on a control element for the at least one heating element.